

NASHUA HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION

Monday, February 22, 2016 6:30 p.m. – Room 208, City Hall

Members:

Robert Sampson
Ald. David Schoneman
Robert Vorbach
Edward Weber

Also present:

Carrie Schena, Manager, Urban Programs Department
Carter Falk, AICP, Deputy Planning Manager, Planning Department

MINUTES:

None.

NEW BUSINESS:

None.

DISCUSSION ITEM #1:

Carrie Schena, Manager, Urban Programs Department, City of Nashua

Mrs. Schena said that the Urban Programs Department oversees a good majority of the Federal money that comes into the City, mostly HUD funds, also, there is a CDBG Program, a lead paint program, housing rehab, and the HOME Program, to fund affordable housing. She said that all these programs, being federally funded, part of the review process involves consultation with the State Historic Office, whether it is in a defined historic district or not.

Mrs. Schena said that the property in question is 42 Chestnut Street, it was most recently used by the Nashua Soup Kitchen, they were there over twenty years and have moved to another location. She said that Habitat for Humanity is interested in purchasing the building, and redeveloping it into two residential dwelling units, of owner occupied housing. She said it's currently a three-story building, the first floor is commercial space, and the top two floors you would be hard-pressed to use it for residential, but at one point it may have been, it's really been chopped up over the years.

Mrs. Schena said that they have consulted with the State Historic Office, as redevelopment would involve demolishing the existing structure and reconstructing something brand new in its place. She said that the cost to rehab the building to make it up to current standards and meet all the building and safety codes, and energy efficiency would be cost prohibitive. She said another problem with rehab is the stairs and the heights of the floors, and it would be very difficult to configure stairs that would meet the Code. She said that all the copper has been removed, so that would be a big expense. She said that there is lead paint and some asbestos. She said that if they

were to try to abate the lead paint for future occupancy, it would be very expensive to do, whereas under demolition, there are different methods to use for control of dust.

Mrs. Schena stated that the State Historic Office has determined that this property lies in the French Village Historic District, and it's not officially nominated to any national or state register, but the State Office feels that it is eligible to be nominated at some point. She said the building was originally used as housing for the mills. She said that according to the State, by removing the structure would cause an adverse effect to the area, and it's not that the City couldn't proceed with an adverse effect, it would just require to mitigate them, so, because there would be a negative effect, they'll want to consult with us on the final design, and what the structure will look like, and they want an architectural historian do a full history of the property, including research of what's been there over the years, and how it relates to the neighborhood, and document it with photographs, so the record is preserved as to what was there.

Mrs. Schena said that the other piece is consulting with interested parties, which is why she's here tonight, they've asked for the input of the local historic district commission. She said that they held a public hearing about a week ago to see if there was any public interest in the project, or in mitigation for the demolition, and staff didn't really get too much response on that, and the meeting night was changed from a snowy night, so it was fair, and obviously Habitat for Humanity spoke in favor of moving forward with the project, and they entered a letter into the record, through the Soup Kitchen, and the Police Athletic League also spoke in support.

Ald. Schoneman asked how many square feet are in the building, and asked what the scope of the project that Habitat wants to do in terms of footprint and square footage.

Mrs. Schena said she is not sure of the exact square footage, she said that the new structure is not anticipated to be any larger than the existing footprint. She said the building occupies almost the entire lot. She said that they have active driveways that belong to the adjacent properties on both sides of the building, which also make it challenging for redevelopment. She said they really want to have two units, but if it gets too tight, it may be a single family.

Ald. Schoneman asked if they anticipate the building being built so close to the sidewalk.

Mrs. Schena said yes, and that is one of the requirements that it is done that way.

Ald. Schoneman said it's possible if the building is made somewhat smaller, they may even get in a small back yard. He asked if there would be a driveway for this house.

Mrs. Schena said that there is a right-of-way, if you're facing the property, it's the driveway on the left, there is a right-of-way written into the deed to access the back of the building.

Ald. Schoneman asked if the State wants to see a design before the building is demolished.

Mrs. Schena said it would be on-going, they've asked at 50% of design completion to be able to weigh in on how it's looking. She said that once we've obtained all the input, it will be put into an official memorandum of agreement with the state office, and that will lay out all the terms of what the mitigation will be, and will allow us to move forward.

Ald. Schoneman asked if we know if there is a basic plan or profile of what the house would look like, such as peaks, roof.

Mrs. Schena said that a very preliminary design, and at first glance it was not in keeping with the neighborhood, but it needs some work. They're looking at a peak facing the front, they're not looking to mimic what's there, it needs to be sympathetic to the neighborhood.

Ald. Schoneman said that we want the area to be revitalized, as long as that area doesn't get lifted up, it will continue to be blighted. He said it is nice to hold onto what you have, too.

Mr. Sampson said that there have been several small grocery stores in that neighborhood, and most of all the smaller ones died when the larger grocery stores came in. He said he's reasonably certain it was Jeanotte's Market, and the current one was their branch market, if it wasn't this building, it was very close nearby. He said it makes sense to him, given the amount of issues with the building, that the proposed project makes a great deal of sense, it creates a residential property in an area that has largely been residential for well over one hundred years, and the proposed plan is wonderful, and is in favor of it.

Ald. Schoneman said that he thinks it's a fine plan, too.

Mr. Sampson said that there were a lot of people living in this area, for the mills.

Ald. Schoneman asked if this truly is the original location of Jeanotte's Market, could there be a plaque on the building indicating that it's the original location of Jeanotte's.

Mr. Sampson said it's his belief that the building was built around 1885. He said he understands that an architectural historian was going to look into the property, and said that he could help and look in the library at the old city directories and see what it was.

Mr. Sampson asked when the architectural historian would be looking into this.

Mrs. Schena said pretty soon, photographs need to be taken of the property before demolition, and Habitat is aiming to get this wrapped up soon, as they'd like to break ground in April, and have all their volunteers lined up.

Mr. Sampson said if he can be of any help to the architectural historian, he'd be glad to do it.

Mr. Vorbach said that the building has a decent footprint, it seems like a lot more can be built there than two units. He said that the Commission's concern is aesthetic, and as an architect, there have been too many missed opportunities to do really excellent design in Nashua, and is hoping that the design is top-notch. He said the building is in the heart of that area, and it will be a catalyst, so the project should be excellent. He said that this is a key project, and is definitely in favor of it, there is solid potential here.

Mr. Weber asked how many floors are proposed.

Mrs. Schena said that they're looking for a two story.

Mr. Weber asked if they are looking at the design from across the street, and if that will be a reflection of what they are looking for.

Mrs. Schena said not necessarily, that design was to mirror what had been there, as far as the symmetry and the front porch. She said that they'll certainly be looking at the neighborhood for suitable examples for size and detail.

Mr. Weber asked if she will be bringing the design back to the Commission for further review.

Mr. Sampson said we'd like to see it, even though this property is not in the Historic District.

Mrs. Schena said that they have the 50% threshold that we have to work with the State historic office, once we get to that point, so it shouldn't be an issue to come back here.

Ald. Schoneman said that this area does need revitalization, so what is done will make a huge difference. He said if you get one property owner to do it, then others will follow.

Mr. Falk mentioned the improvements around Railroad Square, and on Broad Street, they started with one property, and others followed, and there have been some wonderful changes.

Mr. Vorbach said that we can't miss opportunities for excellent design.

Mr. Sampson said at this point, it appears as if a formal motion can be made.

Mr. Falk asked Mrs. Schena if there is any specific language that she needs the HDC to say in the motion.

Mrs. Schena said not necessarily.

MOTION by Mr. Sampson that the Historic District Commission has reviewed the materials presented at our meeting on February 22, 2016, and the material circulated by Mr. Falk is in favor of the plan as presented, with our recommendations of seeing the plans and the reviewing history of the building.

SECONDED by Mr. Weber.

MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY 4-0.

DISCUSSION ITEM #2:

Potential expansion of Historic District Area:

Ald. Schoneman said that the Commissioners have talked about this briefly at previous meetings, and Mayor Donchess has also mentioned it. He said he'd like to start the process, see where areas can be added in.

Ald. Schoneman said that the reason for expanding the Historic District is to protect certain properties, ownership has been relatively stable in the past, and the idea is to move the eastern boundary further to the east, how far it's not certain, and to include Swart Terrace. He said the few people he's spoken with seem supportive. He said he's spoken with a real estate broker who lives on Swart, and asked about property values, and the response is that it's pretty neutral. He said he hopes that this wouldn't impact anyone's property values by doing this. He said right now, it's the frontage lots on Concord Street. He suggested adding Berkeley Street, and possibly Chester Street. He said it should include both sides of the street. He thought about revising the line to include Swart Terrace.

Mr. Weber said we should determine what the type of houses that are there, so we know if they're historical, what's new.

Ald. Schoneman said that Chester Street has homes that are pretty stately. He said that Raymond Street is a little different.

Mr. Sampson said he'd go to Chester Street, the back line, and include the Swart Terrace area.

Mr. Weber asked if every single house on the street needs to be part of the Historic District.

Mr. Vorbach said that is interesting, there are homes with different periods of architecture, and we need to look into things like that.

Ald. Schoneman said that if the houses that are existing are to be renovated, even the way they are, would be a big improvement.

Mr. Falk said that on Concord Street, there is a high level of owner-occupied homes.

Ald. Schoneman said that many of the homes in the Historic District area are multi-family units, especially towards the southern end. He suggested starting at the middle of Laton Street, to the back lot lines of Chester Street, up and including Swart Terrace.

Mr. Sampson said the Foemmel's old house was the original Steven's house, and Phillip Stevens sold that house in 1939 for \$10,000, and built the house next door, where the Bellevance's are now.

Mr. Weber asked if there is any way to get a digital picture of this, and have it sent out to the Commissioners.

Mr. Falk said that the GIS Department can help with printing out a proposed map.

Ald. Schoneman asked about including Greeley Park into the District.

Mr. Sampson said that the park is under the jurisdiction of the Board of Aldermen, and there are really only two structures there, the restroom building, and the bandstand.

Mr. Weber said that where they park their vehicles, it's an original old building, going way back, it's like a garage.

Ald. Schoneman said it's an old original structure, and apparently there was an old resolution from one hundred years ago to remove those buildings out of Greeley Park, and they're still there.

Mr. Sampson said it was originally the Greeley Farm, and it's possible that those were original farm buildings.

Ald. Schoneman said the idea for all of this is to provide protections.

Mr. Vorbach said the stones on the restroom building is a typical park-type rustic look, but on the other side, the bandstand isn't historic.

Mr. Falk said it would offer some protection, god forbid if some bad weather event occurred and destroys the building, at least the Commission would have some input on redevelopment or restoration, you never know what could happen.

Ald. Schoneman said that once these old buildings are gone, they're gone, like the Millyard chimney.

Mr. Weber mentioned the big building on Franklin Street.

Ald. Schoneman said that that one is going to be interesting, they're talking about putting that one into the Historic Register.

Mr. Weber said that they'd have an entrance from the boiler house, the other one has been renovated. He said that any historical items in the building, they're going to bring down.

Ald. Schoneman said he'd like to pursue doing this with the folks that live in the area.

Mr. Vorbach, said that we definitely have a place to start off with. He said he's considered other individual buildings as well, such as the brick structure next to the church on Main Street, that's a great improvement over that strip center that was there, it's far more interesting, it's a stand-alone building.

Mr. Sampson said he believes that the church has a strong sense, and they are going to build a link to that building. He said he'd have no objection to asking that the Baptist Church if they would like to have their church, which is 1853 or something like that, and that house made into the Historic District. He suspected that their answer would be yes, and it would be relatively simple, all we'd have to do is ask the church if they're interested, and if they say yes, that's fine, and if they say no, they won't.

Mr. Weber said that he got to renovate a structure in Malden, it was the Bishop's house, in downtown Malden, it had vinyl siding on it, they took it off and made it back to what it was, all the wood that was there was beautiful, and now it's on the Register.

Mr. Sampson said if the church is going to do this, it would be wonderful publicity and would help us a little bit with the Berkeley Street and Chester Street area.

Ald. Schoneman said that there's the firehouse by the library there, that is an interesting old building, the Odd Fellows Building, where Martha's Exchange is.

Mr. Falk said that Main Street was originally going to be part of the District, but at the time, all the property owners said no. He said it doesn't necessarily mean that we can't propose it again, perhaps there is some different ownership and interest now.

Mr. Vorbach said that there might be an attitude that we are adversarial, which we are not, we appreciate what Nashua is architecturally, and it does matter. He mentioned Columbus, Indiana, one guy made that little city a mecca for architecture, both historic and modern, it was one guy with a vision to make it happen. He said that we have a purpose that is very valid, and we need people to understand that. He said that the Hunt Building has had some nice changes, and piece by piece, people can see some validity of some buildings that look really nice.

Mr. Sampson said the Chandler Library building, and the two or three houses south, one of which was painted and looks really nice, by Prospect Street.

Mr. Weber asked if there is some kind of an outline to bring to the Church about the benefits of being in the District.

Mr. Sampson said that a few months ago, there was an article in the paper, after the Nashua Historical Society took an interest, and the Minister invited him and other members of the Historical Society to take the tour of the house as they were working on it, and he believes that he established a relationship with the Minister, and would be happy to call him informally and say that the Historic District Commission has talked about this, and that the church and the building are important historical landmarks on Nashua's Main Street, and what would the church think of being included in the District, and he'd explain the benefits and limitations. He said they'd probably have to take it up with their governing body. He said it's the Methodist Church. He said it's the brick residence that has been there for 150 years or more, but you couldn't see it due to that little row of the barbershop and restaurant and so forth.

Mr. Weber said that he looked up from the back side, and their peak needs restoration, paint is peeling.

Mr. Sampson said it sounds like we can get a new map made, and asked about the next steps.

Ald. Schoneman said he'd like to call around to people, and have a Ward meeting. He said the map should show a dashed line, so it looks like it's proposed and not done yet, and have it labeled "proposed expansion", and have it go around Greeley Park. He said he'll take the map when it's done and start contacting people.

Mr. Falk said that people can still do quite a bit of work on their house without coming to the Historic District Commission, such as painting, landscaping, anything on the interior, normal routine maintenance.

Mr. Sampson said we have the Berkeley Street, Chester Street area, the Methodist Church on Main Street, the Chandler House and that area, and said that his suggestion is to start with the Church, and getting a map and start talking to people in that area.

MISCELLANEOUS:

ADJOURNMENT:

The meeting was adjourned at 7:40 p.m.

CF/cf